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Haiti Failing to Take Steps Toward Stability, UN Diplomats Say

April 20 (Bloomberg) -- Haiti's political leaders aren't taking steps toward reconciliation needed for successful elections this year and the interim government hasn't begun reconstruction projects to stabilize the Caribbean nation, U.S. and Brazilian diplomats said.

Anne Patterson, the acting U.S. ambassador to the United Nations who joined Security Council envoys on a mission to Haiti last week, said the government needs to resolve the case of former prime minister Yvon Neptune, an opposition member detained without charges since June 2004.

"There is a clear need for national reconciliation," Patterson told reporters at the UN today. "Some Security Council members were a little discouraged by meetings with political leaders who seemed in some respects not to have well-thought-out plans for Haiti's future. It is hard to overcome many years of animosity."

Brazilian Ambassador Ronaldo Sardenberg, who led the Security Council mission, said that while 380 reconstruction projects have been identified and money for them is available, "not many" are under way. He said the projects, most involving road building and improved electrical service, are "beyond the power of the government to implement."

Haiti, the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, has depended on UN, U.S. and foreign troops for security since President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was forced from power during a February 2004 rebellion. Haiti's had a history of political instability since declaring independence from France in 1804 after a revolt by half a million black slaves.

'Things Are Moving'

Leo Merores, Haiti's ambassador to the UN, said talks aimed at political reconciliation with Aristide's Fanmi Lavalas party have begun and "things are moving." He said that while Neptune's case hasn't been resolved, another prisoner, former interior minister Jocelerme Privert, was charged on April 18 with killing political opponents.

Merores said he didn't know when the reconstruction projects would begin.

Sardenberg said the Security Council would probably vote next month to extend the UN peacekeeping mission in Haiti and might ask Secretary-General Kofi Annan to assist the interim government in updating the nation's 200-year-old legal code and improving the judicial system.

In remarks to the Security Council, Sardenberg said the security situation, while "gradually improving, remains fragile."

The UN has 7,413 troops and civilian police in Haiti trying to block efforts by about 200 people in armed gangs to disrupt parliamentary elections set for October and November. Three peacekeepers have been killed in clashes with the gangs in the past month.

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